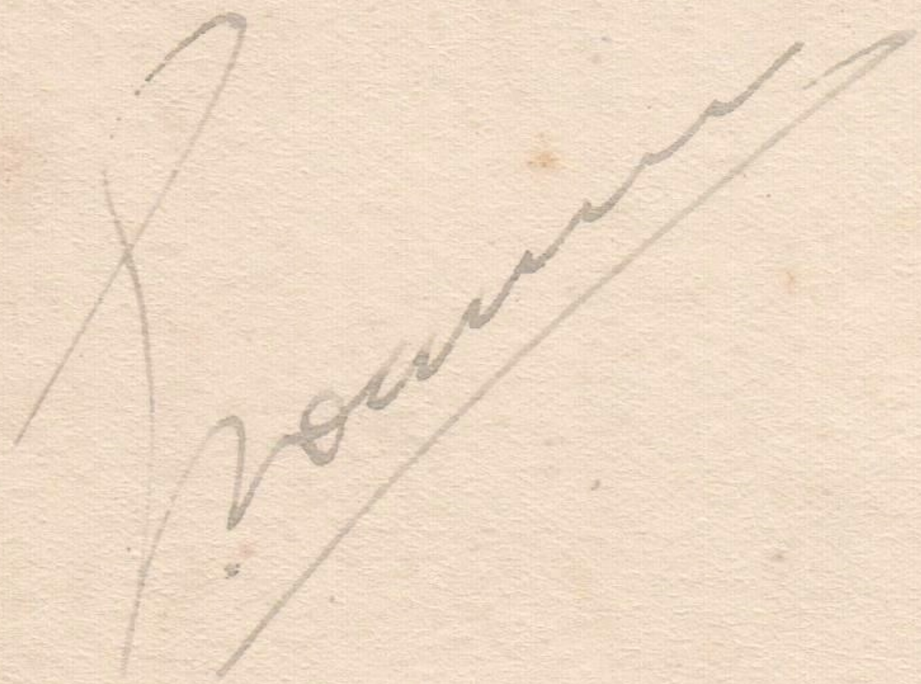
HISTORY OF BEXHILL



THE MANOR HOUSE, BEXHILL

Frontispiece.

A SHORT HISTORY OF

BEXHILL

IN THE COUNTY OF SUSSEX

COMPILED PRINCIPALLY FROM THE LABOUR OF OTHERS

BY

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PRIVATELY PUBLISHED

BEXHILL

1927

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The Earl de la Warr

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A SHORT HISTORY OF BEXHILL

THE Paramount Manor[1] of Bexhill, of which Barnhorne and Buckholt are sub-infeudations,[1] is situate in the Hundred[1] of Bexhill at the extreme western point of the Rape[1] of Hastings in the County of Sussex. From the Manor Paramount the Hundred derived its name, as did later both the inland village which clustered round its fortified Manor House and the present Borough of Bexhill.

In early days the name was variously spelt as Bexelei (Domesday Book), Bixlea, Bexle, Becksley, or Bixle, its former and present designations being alike clearly derived from the numerous becks or brooks which intersect its area.

Before the Conquest the Manor of Bexhill was vested in the See of Selsey (which See was transferred to that of Chichester in 1057).

An ancient deed purporting to have been executed as early as A.D. 772 apparently contains the original grant to the See of Selsey. It runs as follows:

"Grant for life by Offa, King of the Angles, to Oswald, Bishop of Chichester, of land at Bixlea, or Bexhill, co. Sussex, with reversion to the See of Chichester (Selsey). August 15th, A.D. 772. (MS. Lambeth 1212, p. 387.) **Dawson, Vol. II., p. 381.**

"In the name of our Lord God the Saviour.

"Everything that is done for this present life, scarcely lasts until death, but what is done for eternal life, remains eternally, even after death. Therefore, everyone ought to think and devise with careful forethought of the mind that, since the possessions of this present age fail us, he may obtain the abiding possessions of the Heavenly promises. Wherefore I, Offa, King of the Angles, for the good of my soul, from love to God, made over to Oswald, the venerable Bishop, as I formerly

[1] *Vide* Glossary.

promised to Almighty God, some portion of the county of Sussex, for building a monastery on it, and for enlarging the church (*basilica*) which may serve for Divine praise and to the honour of the Saints. I make over the possession of it in perpetuity, that is eight hides[1] (*cassatos*) of land in the place which is called Bixlea, as is marked out by the boundaries."

The foregoing is in Latin; then follows in Anglo-Saxon:

"These are the land-boundaries of the eight hides[1] of domain (*i.e.*, land in occupation of the lord) in the land of the Bexwaras (Bex-dwellers). First in the (?) neighbouring trees, then from the — tree south to the meadow-land, then along the seashore to over against Codancliff (?Couden Cliff) Eastwards (more probably Esteferd is the name of a place—? Easterford, opposite Codancliff and meaning the river-bank land) and then inland to the old sea-dyke; then north through the short grass (pasture-land) to the boundary-post; from the post to Nodingford; from the ford along the river to Straftbridge; from the bridge up along the drain to the Bedan-well; from the well south along the boundary again to — tree."

Then follows in Latin:

"In those places that are called by the following names: At Berna Hornan[2] III. hida, at Thyrtlesham I., at Ibbanhyrstel I., at Croghyrste VIII., at Hrigce I., at Gyllingan II., at Fuccerham VII., and at Blacanbrocan I., at Ikelesham III."

Then in Latin:

"With all that belongs to it, things, fields, woods, meadows, fisheries. That from this day the above-named land, which as I have said was given by me in God's name, shall be free from all royal exactions, and remain in perpetuity transferred to the use of the servants of God. On this condition, however, that after his day this donation shall revert to the Episcopal See called SELESEIG (Selsey).

"If anyone ever dares to lessen this donation made by me

[1] *Vide* Glossary. [2] Barn Horne.

in the greatest or in the slightest degree, let him know that in the strict judgment of Almighty God he will incur the penalty of his presumption, and will not be acquitted of the wickedness brought home to him. . . ."

Then follows in Latin:

"This short deed (*cartula*) was written in the year 772 after the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the tenth Indiction, on the fifteenth day of August.

"✠I, Offa, King of the Mercians, as power has been given to me by the ruling God, have confirmed this charter of donation, signing it with my own hand, and have affixed the sign of the Holy Cross.

"✠I, Ecberht, King of Kent, have agreed and signed.

"✠I, Jænberhtus, by the grace of God, Archbishop, have signed.

"✠I, Cynewulf, King of the Western Saxons, have agreed to this donation and signed.

"✠I, Eadberhtus, have assented and signed.

"✠I, Osuualdus, bishop, have signed those things that were given to me.

"✠I, Righeah, bishop have agreed.

"✠I, Diora, bishop, have signed.

"✠I, Osuualdus, Duke of Sussex, have agreed.

"✠I, Osmund, Duke, have confirmed it.

"✠I, Ælbuunald, Duke, have acquiesced.

"✠I, Oslac, Duke, have agreed.

"And these witnesses were also present whose names are written below.

"✠ Botuuine Abbot, ✠ Eata, ✠ Bryne, ✠ Berht, ✠ Heabercht, ✠ Stidberht, ✠ Brynhere, ✠ Brorda, ✠ Cyne, ✠ Tota, ✠ Berthuald, ✠ Ealdred, ✠ Scira, ✠ Oesne, ✠ Lulling, ✠ Æmele, prefect" (the Latin is *antistes*, "president," and in later Latin occasionally "bishop").

"All these who consented signed and confirmed it."

The manor remained vested in the See of Selsey until the time of the Conquest, when it was laid waste by the invaders

and was afterwards granted by William the Conqueror, together with the "Castellany of Hastings" and many other domains, to Robert, Count of Eu, one of his principal vassals, who contributed a fleet of sixty ships to the invader's forces. The date of the grant is uncertain, but it was probably previous to 1070. In the Domesday Book it is recorded that the Manor was formerly parcel of the Bishopric, and that it was held in the time of King Edward by Bishop Alric or Ægelric. This Ægelric was Bishop of Selsey in 1059 and lived four years after the Conquest, till 1070, when he died.

Dawson, Vol. I., p. 19. For Seal of the Counts of Eu, *vide* Moss, p. 95.

The reference to Bexhill in the Domesday Book, which great survey was commenced in 1085 and completed the following years, is as follows:

Sussex Domesday, General Introduction.

Dawson, Vol. II, p 382.

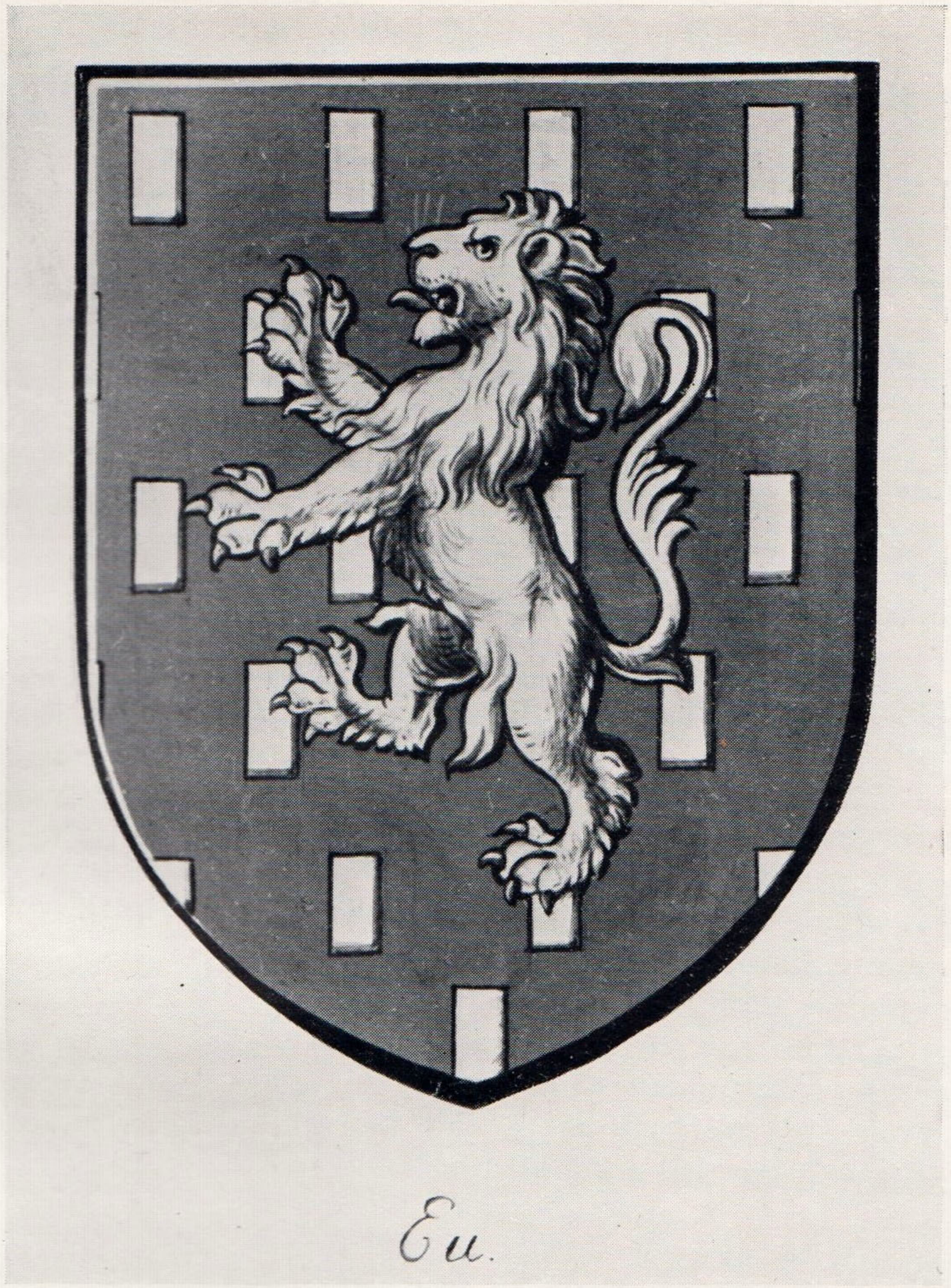
"In Bexlei Hundred—Osbern holdeth of the Earl (of Eu) Bexlei—Bishop Alric[1] held it in the time of King Edward, because it belongs to the See (Selsey), and he afterwards held until King William gave the castellany (*castellarium*) of Hastings to the Count (of Eu). In the time of King Edward, and now, it vouched for twenty hides.[2] There is land for twenty-six ploughs.[2]

"Of the land of this manor the Count himself holdeth in demesne[2] three hides,[2] and there he hath one plough[2] and seven villeins[2] with four ploughs.

"Of the same land Osbern hath ten hides, Wenenc one hide, William de Sept Mueles two hides and a half, less half a rod, Robert St. Leger one hide and half a rod, Reinbert half a hide, Anschitil half a hide, Robert Cruel half a hide, Geoffrey and Roger,[3] clerks, one hide in prebend.[2] There are two churches. In demesne are four ploughs and forty-six villeins and twenty-seven cottars[2] with twenty-eight ploughs. In all the manor six acres of meadow.

[1] Ægelric was Bishop of Selsey in 1059. This prelate continued in the See at the time of the Norman Conquest and for four years after (1070), when he died. The above extract from Domesday clearly shows the appropriation of the manor of Bexhill to the bishopric of Selsey in the time of Edward the Confessor.

[2] *Vide* Glossary. [3] See Earl Henry's Charter.



Eu.

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"The whole manor in the time of King Edward was worth £20, and afterwards it was waste. Now £18 and 10 shillings. Of these the Count's share takes 40 shillings.

"Osbern holdeth of the Count two rods of land in the same hundred, and for two rods it hath always vouched. There he hath five oxen in a plough. It was worth 8 shillings, now 16 shillings.

"Leuenot held Bolintun[1] of King Edward, and it then and now vouched for five hides. There is land for five ploughs.

"Of this land the Count holdeth in demesne three rods, and there hath 20 burgesses and 5 cottars with two ploughs.

"The Abbey of Ultresport[2] holdeth three hides less two rods and they vouch for so much. In demesne is one plough, and thirteen villeins with thirteen cottars have five ploughs and twenty acres of meadow.

"In the time of King Edward the whole manor was worth £6 and afterwards 50 shillings, now the Count hath 43 shillings and the monks £4."

From the above it would appear that Bexhill was at the time of the invasion a place of some considerable importance, both from the fact that it had two churches and also from the valuation placed upon it and the population it would seem to have carried; and with regard to the latter, it may be pointed out that the total population of the County of Sussex was estimated to have been only 10,411 in the year 1085. It is a curious fact that there is no direct mention of the town of Hastings or of Hastings Castle in Domesday, the only reference to the latter being in connection with Bexhill.

Sussex Domesday, General Introduction.

Bexhill remained the property of the Counts of Eu until the year 1148, when the continual requests of the Bishops of Chichester to King Stephen for the restoration to them of "the manor of Bixla (Bexhill) with the Hundred and its churches, together with all its appurtenances from the time of the Conquest, and from the time thereof memory is not," were

[1] This is supposed to be Bulverhithe.

[2] The Benedictine Abbey of Tréport, *Ulterius portus*, or sometimes *Ulterior portus*, at the mouth of the Bresle, was founded by Robert, Count of Eu.

at length successful, and a deed was executed in London in 1147 by John, Count of Eu, by which the property was re-conveyed to the See of Chichester, and a grant of confirmation of such assurance was obtained from King Stephen.

Dawson, Vol. II., p. 383.

The following is a memorandum in the register of Chichester Cathedral:

"John, Count of Eu, made a recognition or acknowledgment that his grandfather and father did unjustly take away from the church of the Holy Trinity of Chichester their mother the village called Bixle, with the churches and all other its appurtenances and notwithstanding remonstrances of Godefrid, Ralph, and Siffrid, Bishops of that said church and the claims by them laid thereto, did for a long time against justice and the writings of the said church with peril of their soul detain the same.[1]

"Wherefore, he, with the consent of King Stephen, for the health of those his parents and himself, wholly restored to the said church, and Hilary bishop thereof, the said village with the churches and all its members and other its appurtenances as well in woodland as in plain land and in waters with its liberties and customs and retained nothing to himself or his successors or heirs of right, custom, or service, and lest at any time hereafter any dispute should arise concerning the appurtenances of the said village, he allowed everything to belong thereto, which the writings of the church of Chichester show, saving nevertheless the service of the King.

"This restitution (not 1248, as in Dugdale's copy of the charter), was made in the year of our Lord's Incarnation 1148 at London in the church of St. Paul on the XVIII kalends of December on which day was the feast and translation of St. Erkenwald, confessor in that church. And there were then present as witnesses of that restitution, Robert, Bishop of London, Ralph, Bishop of Bath, S. Bishop of Worcester, and R. Bishop of Exeter, Gervase, Abbot of Westminster, Edward,

[1] The great Normans possessed themselves by force of several manors then belonging to the church at, or soon after, the Conquest. See another instance in Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, in Eadmer, f. 9, n. 30, and in Eadm., f. 196, n. 20.

The See of Chichester.

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Abbot of Reading, Galfrid, Abbot of Waverleye, and other persons.

"Confirmed by King Stephen."

A house of residence in Bexhill had been presented to the Canons of Chichester by Robert de Creol, also known as Robert the Cruel (probably an ancestor of the Ashburnham family), and later this house seems to have become the Bishop's Palace or fortified manor-house, for there are several recorded instances of the sojourn of the Bishops of Chichester at their eastern residence, and they seem to have set considerable store by it. Sir Richard de la Wycke (1245-1253), the twelfth bishop, probably rebuilt it, as it contains arches of the Early English period, and the thirty-first Bishop, Adam de Moleyns (1445-1450) had licence from the King, 26th Henry VI, to "empark 2,000 acres at Bexhill and to enclose with stone and embattle his manor of the said name." A part of the said building (says Lower) "is still known as the prison and not far from the house on the south is a terraced field commanding a glorious view over Pevensey Bay called the 'pleasure-house field,' doubtless an ancient plaisaunce of the Bishops."

Dawson, Vol. II., p. 383.

Lower, Vol. I., p. 49.

The manor of Bexhill passed from the possession of the See during the devastation of the great religious houses under the Tudors, but it was still held by the Bishop of Chichester in the twenty-sixth year of the reign of Henry VIII., when we find amongst the records of the first-fruits and tenths of the Bishop of Chichester "demesne[1] lands in Bexhill £7 and quit and copyhold rents £9 18s. 1d."

Dawson, Vol. II., p. 383.

By virtue of an Act of Parliament passed in the first year of her reign for "Restitution of the Crown Revenues" Queen Elizabeth, by a deed of exchange dated July 12, 3rd Elizabeth, during the vacancy of the See of Chichester, took into her own hands "the manor of Beckeshill (Bexhill) and lands, etc., thereto belonging," and in the 12th Elizabeth we find that Lord Buckhurst[2] was seized of the Paramount Manor of Bexhill.

[1] *Vide* Glossary.

[2] Thomas Sackville, first Earl of Dorset and Baron Buckhurst (1536-1608), co-author with Thomas Norton (1532-1584) of "Gorboduc," the first English tragedy in blank verse. *Cf.* Dict. Nat. Biog.

Through him it passed to the Dorset family and thence to the Countess of Plymouth and so to the present Lord of the Manor, the ninth Earl de la Warr. With the passing of the manor into the Buckhurst family, the history of Bexhill for the next three centuries seems to have been that of a peaceful country village grouped round its manor house, waiting for the time to come when the track of the charcoal burner in the surrounding forest should be replaced by the iron road of the railway, and the jaded workers of the inland towns should seek the invigorating breezes of the southern coast. Sometimes for a moment the veil of obscurity is lifted. In the year 1729 there was published by one Richard Budgen of London, and printed for John Senex at the Globe over against St. Dunstan's Church in Fleet Street, a pamphlet entitled "An Account of the Passage of the Hurricane from the Seaside, at Bexhill in Sussex to Newingden-Level, May 20th, 1729," which relates amongst the particulars "of the Damage and Devastation" therein set forth "that the first considerable Damage was received by Thomas Hollands, at the lower side of Bexhill Down about a mile from the Seaside. . . . About a furlong to the South West from Thomas Hollands; John Nash had slyght Damage. . . . Woodgate belonging to Henry Goldsmith was left upon the Western Verge of the Hurricane. . . . John Philcocks's House at Sidley Green was next in its passage, which it nearly all uncovered. . . . A cheesebail and a Voler[1] were taken from a Shelf in a Chamber, and a Duck's Wing that lay upon the same shelf was left. The Voler was found some days after about a furlong from the House, but the Cheesebail has not been heard of since." Northward the gale swept on through Engrim Wood, which stood north-east of the present Sidley cricket ground, "wherein one hundred and fifty oaks are torn up with the roots." "The Coal Wood (the present Cole Wood) was next in its way." "In the Heniker Wood" (now known as Great Henniker Wood) more damage was done and the "Farmhouse of Buckhold" being the "next Obstacle in the way" was severely damaged, "some of the Timber and Tiles

S.A.C., XXXVI., p. 119.

[1] Cheesebail: hoop that gives form to the cheese in press. Voler: the board that fits into the bail.

Thomas Sakeville. Comte de Dorset, Baron Buckhurst.

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being Carried" over "a Standing Wood above a quarter of a mile."

The subsequent course of the storm is traced in great detail, and the account affords considerable topographical information of the country district lying to the north of Bexhill.

Some hundred years later the peace of Bexhill was once again disturbed, this time by human agency. "In the early part of the present century (*i.e.*, the nineteenth) an attempt was made to establish a colliery here. The appearance of thin seams of fibrous lignite, not uncommon in the Wealden formation, induced some sanguine adventurers to sink shafts and erect machinery at an enormous cost. Adventurers of another kind encouraged the scheme and fictitious specimens of coal were brought to the surface. But at length, after an outlay of £80,000, the project was abandoned as completely abortive." Sir John Herschel, in his discourse on the "Study of Natural Philosophy" (1830), also refers to this attempt at coal-mining, pointing out that "the whole assemblage of geological facts were adverse to existence of a coal bed in the Hastings strata."[1] Lower, Vol. I., p. 49.

Of the two churches mentioned in the Domesday Survey, Dawson observes: "Notwithstanding the mention in the Domesday Survey of two churches in Bexhill, the church or chapel of Bulverhythe does not seem to have been intended. One of these churches was probably the present church of St. Mary of Bexhill and the other perhaps the church or chapel at Northeye." Be this as it may, it is certain that when Count Robert endowed the Collegiate Church of St. Mary in the Castle of Hastings "he gave and granted in alms to the prebends"[2] very considerable endowments, amongst the long list of which may be found "To the prebend of William Alleck the Church of Bekele and the tithes and half a hide[2] of land and one rod." It should be mentioned that the date of the original foundation charter is unknown, but it was certainly previous to Count Robert's death, which is presumed to have taken place in 1090, and the charter was re-enacted by his grandson, Dawson, Vol. II., p. 382. Dawson, Vol. I., pp 21, 22.

[1] *Cf.* also Mantell's "Geology of Sussex," p. 35. London, 1822.
[2] *Vide* Glossary.

Count Henry of Eu, in the early part of the reign of Henry I. At a later period Battle Abbey acquired a portion of the tithes of Bexhill, "and in 32 Henry III. the same abbey recovered twenty acres of land with the appurtenances in 'Bixle' from William de Northeye. Upon the inquisition taken at Bixle before John Olyver, the King's escheator, June 15, 1388 (12 Richard II.), on the oaths of John Brekellesham and others, it was found that Thomas Rushoke, late Bishop of Chichester, held the manor of Bixle with the appurtenances in which was a messuage worth nothing beyond reprises. One hundred acres of land, of which there were that year sown with corn twelve acres, with beans six acres, with rye four acres, and with oats twenty-six acres, worth per acre to let to farm 3d. and no more. There were also eighty acres of pasture worth 12d. an acre, also eight acres of thick woodland worth nothing beyond reprises, also 110s. a year rents of assize payable quarterly, and the profits of the court worth beyond reprises 10s., also 30 cocks to be rendered on the feast of the Nativity worth 2d. a head, also one hundred eggs to be rendered at Easter worth 5d., total £8 6s. 9d."[1]

Dawson, Vol. II., p. 383.

Of the ancient Parish Church of St. Peter, Bexhill, Dawson writes, "This first church is late Norman in style passing into Early English, and was probably built after the year 1148 when John, Count of Eu, restored this church and portion of the Prebend of Bexela to Hilary, Bishop of Chichester."

Dawson, Vol. II., p. 385.

The registers date from 1558. In 1776 a peal of six bells was hung in the church tower, superseding the four then in use. (These were cast in 1769. *Cf.* S.A.C., Vol. XVI., p. 200.)

Dr. Wills draws attention to a curious entry in the Parish Register:

Wills, p. 21.

> "Mem. Ap. 8, 1776.
>
> "It is agreed that Wm. Curtis shall have two guineas and a half to cure Sarah Davis of her leprosy for two years to come, and if she does not appear to be clear of the disorder at that time he is not to have any more money; if she is clear he is to have one pound six shil-

[1] Addl. MSS. No. 9165, p. 213, collated with original at Carlton-House-Ride MS.

lings and three pence, and if she sh. want any thing for the next year she is to have it for five shillings."

"N.B.—He has received one pound six shillings and threepence in part at this time."

"Witness my hand,

"WILLIAM CURTIS."

"Before we leave Bexhill Church, it should be mentioned that it formerly possessed a fine old painted window. In two compartments of the tracery were two regal figures, probably representing Christ and the Blessed Virgin, as at Hooe Church. It is doubtful from what window in the church this painted glass was taken. The following details and correspondence sufficiently show how this window was lost to the church, and came into the possession of Horace Walpole, eventually drifting into other hands. **Dawson, Vol. II., pp. 386, 387.**

"Letter from Horace Walpole to George Montague, Esq., Strawberry Hill, Monday, November 24th, 1760, mentions that:

"'I am come to put my *Anecdotes of Painting* into the press. . . . I want you kindly to help me in a little affair that regards it. I have found in an MS. that in the church of Beckley or Bexley in Sussex there are portraits on glass in a window of Henry III. and his Queen. I have looked in the map, and find the first name between Bodiham and Rye, but I am not sure it is the place. I will be much obliged to you if you will write directly to your Sir Whistler (Webster) and beg him to inform himself very exactly if there is any such thing in such church near Bodiham. Pray state it minutely; because if there is I will have them drawn for the frontispiece to my work'[1]

[1] Mr. Wm. Horsfield, criticising the engraving in his "History of Sussex," says: "The engraver seems to have taken some liberty with the drawing by shortening and curling the hair, which in the original was waving or flowing and long. Nor was the beard thin, sharp, and the points extended as in the plate, but rather bushy upon the chin. (See *Hayley MSS.*, Vol. II., p. 165.) Mr. Hayley was of opinion that Edward III. and Queen Philippa were the persons represented."

"The windows were subsequently engraved, and appeared in various editions of Walpole's *Anecdotes of Painting*.

"Unfortunately Mr. Montague's reply is not forthcoming, but we learn the result of the correspondence, from a letter addressed by Walpole to the Rev. Cole, dated Strawberry Hill, October 23rd, 1771:

> "'I am building a small chapel, too, in my garden, to receive two valuable pieces of antiquity, and which have been presents singularly lucky for me. They are the window from Bexhill, with the portraits of Henry III. and his Queen, procured for me by Lord Ashburnham. The other, great part of the tomb of Capoccio, mentioned in my *Anecdotes of Painting*, on the subject of the Confessor's Shrine, and sent to me from Rome, by Mr. Hamilton, our Minister at Naples. It is very extraordinary that I should happen to be master of these curiosities.'—Vol. II., pp. 393-4.

"The next extract is from 'A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole, at Strawberry Hill, etc.,' in *Works*, Vol. II., 4to, London, 1798, p. 508:

> "'STRAWBERRY HILL,
> "'THE CHAPEL.
>
> "'In the windows are the original portraits[1] of Henry III. and his Queen in painted glass, with other saints and coats of arms.
>
> "'The window was brought from the church of Bexhill, in Sussex. The two principal figures are King Henry III. and Eleanor of Provence, his Queen, the only portraits of them extant. King Henry died in 1272, and we know of no painted glass more ancient than the reign of King John. These portraits have been engraved for the frontispiece to the *Anecdotes of Painting*.' (4to, Strawberry Hill, 1765, Vol. I.; also frontispiece to Vol. III. of *Collected Works*, 1798.)

[1] "These were a present from the then Earl of Ashburnham."

"The next extract shows the subsequent fate of the window. *Auction Catalogue of the Classic Contents of Strawberry Hill, collected bv Horace Walpole.* 4to, London, 1842, p. 247:

"'Twenty-fourth day's sale.
"'The Chapel in the grounds.

"'84. A very fine ancient stained glass window, in seventeen compartments, in which are represented the original portraits of Henry III. and his Queen, with saints at whole length, coats of arms and other devices; it was a present from the Earl of Ashburnham, and was brought from the church of Bexhill, in Sussex.

"'The portraits of Henry and his Queen are the only ones known; they have been engraved, and are more fully described in Horace Walpole's *Anecdotes of Painting.*'

"*Aedes Strawberrianæ. Names of purchasers and the prices to the detailed Sale Catalogue of the Collection, etc.* 4to, London, 1842, p. 56.

"'Twenty-fourth day's sale, May 21st, 1842.

"'"Furniture in the Long Gallery, the Stained Glass Windows, Shrine and Effects in the Chapel, etc." It was sold to "— Whitaker, Esq." (probably of Cambridge), for £30 9s., and is now preserved by Mr. G. Milner-Gibson Cullum, at Hardwick House, Bury St. Edmunds, having been purchased by his grandfather, the late Rev. Sir Thomas Gray Cullum, Bart, F.S.A. The lights were mounted as a staircase window, along with other old pieces of stained glass. The Author has lately seen these two lights: they belong to the Perpendicular period (early Fifteenth Century); both figures have a nimbus about the head, and the hand of the male figure is raised as if in giving the Blessing. They probably represent Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary.'"

To return to the Manor of Bexhill. We have traced the history of the Paramount Manor, and a word or two must be spared for the two sub-infeudations of Barnhorne and Buckholt, with regard to which only a few scattered references can be

found. In the Chronicle of Battle Abbey there are some half-dozen mentions of "Bernhorn" and "Buckholt," including a full account of how the Abbey of St. Martin of Battle recovered from Gilbert de Baillol, in the reign of Henry II., "Three wists[1] of land at Bernhorn with the whole marsh and a certain tithe of Bockholt" at the great inquest held by the King at Clarendon. In 1390 Richard de Metford, Bishop of Chichester, granted to Sir William de Northeye Knight, and his heirs, the park of Boxholt or Buckholt in Bexhill hundred, to be holden by him so long as he should continue to pay to the same Bishop or his successors, as an acknowledgment of the fealty and service due from him to them as their tenant, "one hind of his herd (*unam damam de grege*) and a fox-net (*unam vulpinam cassiam*)." The subsidy roll of Henry IV.'s reign further states that "John Brenchisle was seized (*inter alia*) of the manors of Bokholt and Bixle of the yearly value of £10."

Chronicle of Battle Abbey, pp. 58, 116, 119, 121.

Dawson, Vol. II., p. 384.

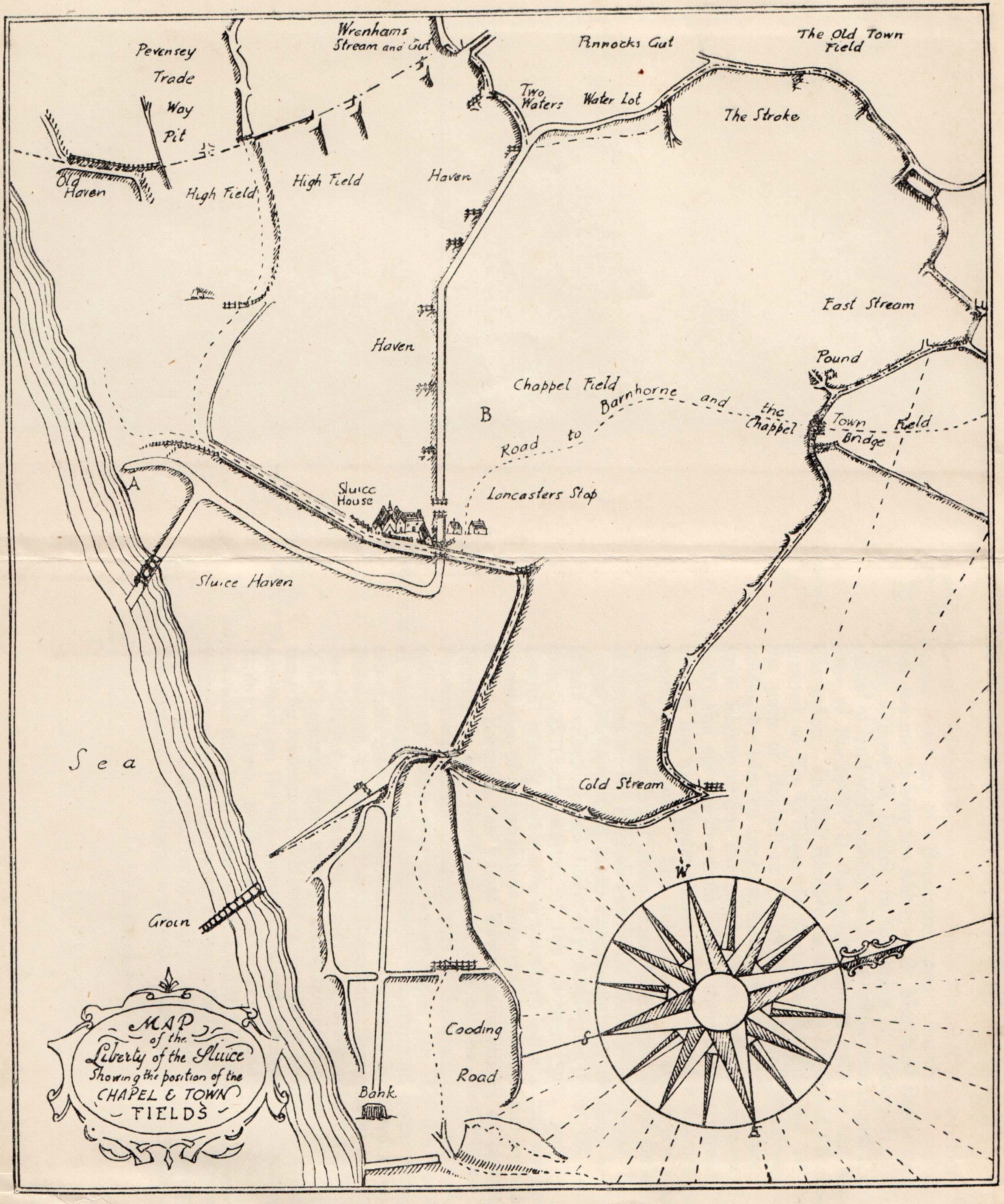
It would at first seem improbable that Bexhill, being an inland village, could have any connection with the famous historical Confederation of the Cinque Ports, and in fact Bexhill herself was never a member; but she had within the boundaries of her parish as they are now within the boundaries of the Borough the "Lost Town" and chapel or chapels of Northeye, and Northeye was one of the five "limbs" or "members" of the premier port of Hastings, and, moreover, a subsidiary cinque port in its own right. In 1229 the members of Hastings are thus described: "Hastyng ad quem pertinent tamquam membra unus vicus litus (?) maris in Seford, Peiyinse, Bulwareth, Hydonye, Iham, Bekysborn, Grenetha et Northeye. Servicia inde debita domino regi XXI naves, et in qualibet nave XXI hominas cum uno garcione qui dicitur gromet," which may be translated: "Hastings, to which belong as members one town on the sea-shore in Seaford, Pevensey, Bulverhythe, Hidney, Iham, Beaksbourne, Grenhithe, and Northeye. The services due from them to our Lord the King are 21 ships, and in each ship 21 men, with a boy called a gromet" ("gromet" seems to be a diminutive of groom, hence the Sussex euphemism "grummett," signifying a clumsy youth or hobble-de-hoy, and

Jeake, p. 25.

S.A.C., Vol. I., p. 15.

Parish, p. 51.

[1] *Vide* Glossary.



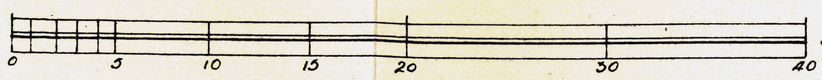
FROM "S.A.C.," VOL. XIX.

To face page 19.

BEXHILL MANOR

CIRCA 1806

Scale of Chains.



To face page 19.

in this case no doubt a cabin-boy). Northeye is not, however, mentioned in the later charters.[1] Thus in the General Charter of Hastings as a cinque port granted by Charles II. all the ports are mentioned with their respective limbs, corporate and incorporate, with the exception of Northeye, Reculver, and Stoney. As the termination "eye" suggests, the "lost town" stood on an eye or island. It was situated in the marshes between Pevensey and Bexhill about some three miles north-east of Pevensey Castle. The "ruins of Northeye Chapel" are marked in Speed's map of Sussex, 1610, and in Budgen's county map of 1724. The chapel is described as being "within the Liberty of the Sluice," whereas the town of Northeye would appear to have been without the liberty. Near the Sluice House is an elevated piece of land still called "the chapel field" and so marked in the accompanying map, while the site of the town may be traced to an enclosure near the foot of Barnhorne Hill which is still called "the Old Town field." For further particulars of the "lost town" and of its lord, William de Hastings, commonly known as William de Northeye, whose family afterwards occupied the manor of Buckholt, the curious will find ample information in the Sussex Archæological Collections.

S.A.C., Vol. XIX., p. 3.

S.A.C., Vol. XIX., p. 8.

The two civil wars which swept across Sussex, the Barons' War of 1264-68, with its Battle of Lewes, and the long struggle between King Charles and his Parliament, left Bexhill undisturbed, though Henry III. twice passed by as near as Battle with "rapine, ravages, and extortions." But the great conflict with France, which culminated in the overthrow of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, left its impress on the town. During the Napoleonic wars a large body of Hanoverian troops was quartered in Bexhill; the site of their barracks, which may be traced in the still existing names of Barrack Road and Barrack Hall, is set out in the reproduction of a section of the map of Bexhill Manor (*circa* 1806) which is here set out, and which shows the situation of the barracks and parade

Blaauw, pp. 114, 200.

[1] Jeake, p. 122: "Hasting had Seford and Northye, which latter is not mentioned in the later charters, but probably is the Field yet called Northey lying to the Westward of Bulverhithe toward Bexhill, being all the devouring Sea hath now left thereof, or else that which lyeth near Cowding (Cooden) Westward of Bexhill."

ground, together with a portion of the village of Bexhill as it then existed; and local tradition asserts that the great Duke of Wellington, then Sir Arthur Wellesley, visited Bexhill to inspect the troops, and points to the iron staple at Barrack Hall on which he hitched the bridle of his charger. Parry says: "The eight miles from Pevensey to Bexhill are uninteresting, the views into the interior of the country limited. The first portion of Bexhill is built on each side of a long and steep hill; having ascended this we view the spot on the right hand where in the late war were very extensive barracks erected for Hanoverian troops, said to be spacious enough for the accommodation of 10,000 men. . . . Farther on is another part of the populous village of Bexhill containing upwards of two thousand inhabitants and an old heavy church with a low tower, on the left hand, its chancel indicating the thirteenth century. This place is occasionally used as a marine residence, the sea being only two miles distant."

Parry, p. 217.

In 1805 Martello erected along the southern coast, to the order of the British Government, the chain of towers which bears his name as a means of defence to a possible French invasion. Although the actual number of such towers at Bexhill as originally constructed by Martello is uncertain, there were in existence by February 1, 1813 (as appears by a map published on that date by Lieut.-Colonel Mudge at the Tower of London and officially stamped by the Ordnance Survey in 1879), twelve Martello Towers within the boundaries of the Borough. These were numbered from east to west, and comprised Nos. 44 to 55 consecutively.

It is doubtful if Bexhill itself ever received the grant of a market or an annual fair,[1] and would seem to have depended on the neighbouring manor of Bulverhythe for that convenience, notwithstanding Burrell's implication to the contrary. Burrell quotes (Addl. MS. 5679, p. 163) a Charter of 3 Edward II., by which John de Brittania (Britanny), Earl of Richmond, Lord of the Rape of Hastings, procured a grant of a weekly market on Monday and a fair of four days every year—viz., "the eve

S.A.C., Vol. XXXVI., p. 185.

Burrell MS., British Museum.

[1] Wills states (but gives no authority) that "It (Bexhill) had its annual feast-day and fair, held in the Pleasure-house field" (of the Manor House).

Wills, p. 19.

and day of the Annunciation of ye Blessed Virgin and two days after" at his manor at Bulewarehithe (Bulverhythe) or Bolewarhithe. On an inquisition at the death of the same John of Britanny (an. 8 Edward III.) the jurors returned: "That there were at Bulwarhethe pertaining to the said barony of Hastings—20 acres of salt pasture worth per annum 6s. 8d., price of the acre 4d. . . . Also that there was at the same a passage over the water of Bule-warethe, which less or more produced one year with another 8s. per annum, and which was payable by equal portions . . . making together a total annual revenue of 68s. 4d." Dawson, Vol. II., p. 389.

The area of the present Borough of Bexhill comprises some 8,662 acres, including water and foreshore, and thus corresponds somewhat closely with that of the former parish, to which Lower assigns an acreage of 8,814 and Horsfield one of 7,800. The population, which in 1801 amounted to 1,091, in 1811 was 1,627, rose slowly to 1,867 in 1831, and in 1861 had reached the figure of 2,084. In 1911 it stood at 15,330, the present population being about 23,000. The parish was governed from 1884 by a Local Board, which was superseded in 1894 by an Urban District Council, which was in turn dissolved by the incorporation of Bexhill as a municipal borough, a charter having been granted in April, 1902. Lower, Vol. I., p. 48. Horsfield, Vol. I., p. 427.

The extension of Bexhill towards the sea and its birth as a watering-place was of course owing to the advent of the railway, but it would seem to have obtained some small fame as a bathing resort in earlier times. In the *Star* newspaper for the year 1813 there occurred an advertisement of property for sale at Bexhill, comprising a substantial modern dwelling house suitable for "the reception of a family of respectability," and setting forth that Bexhill is "one of the most healthy and pleasant situations on the coast of Sussex and well adapted for sea bathing, for which purpose it is occasionally resorted to." And its growth as a sea-side resort, though rapid in later years, was at first slow, and its start as such was long delayed. Lower, writing as late as 1870, says: "This large and important parish on the English Channel has a picturesque village, seated on an agreeable eminence commanding extensive

views both of sea and land. As yet it is almost the only really available site on the Sussex coast that has not been turned into a 'watering place,' for which its natural beauty and healthful climate eminently qualify it."

So rapid has the latter growth of the borough been that there are men now living who have shot wild fowl where our Town Hall now stands, as are also those who can remember when only three cottages stood between the "Old Town" and the shore; in 1871 the number of inhabited houses was only 456 and the population 2,158; some indeed even believe that they can recollect the Pell, or Creek, which intersected the coast where Channel View and the Pavilion now stand, and which is shown on the old map here reproduced.

A list of those books which have been cited and consulted has already been set out, but it may be convenient to quote one or two passages referring to Bexhill from the earlier and scarcer works. The great William Camden in the sixth edition of his "Britannia," published in 1610, and for the first time then put into English by Doctor Philemon Holland, writes as follows under "Suth-sex" (Sussex): "Now to returne to the sea-coast about three miles from Pevensey is Beckeshill, a place much frequented by Saint Richard Bishop of Chichester, and where he died. (This is incorrect: Sir Richard de la Wycke died and was buried at Chichester.) Under this is Bulver-hith on an open shore, with a rooflesse Church, not so named of a bulles hide which cut into thongs by William the Conqueror reached to Battaile (as they fable) for it had that name before his coming."

Camden.

Horsfield, Vol. I., p. 426, *et seq.*

Horsfield in his "History of Sussex," 1835, devotes some pages to the description of Bexhill, but his account, often slightly inaccurate, has been supplemented and corrected by those of Lower and Dawson. Horsfield, however, gives some useful information as to the "monumental inscriptions" in the church, and cites two epitaphs:

"'Farewell, vain world, I must be gone,
Here is no rest for me;
I take my staff and travel on,
A better world to see.'"

NORDEN'S MAP OF THE COAST OF EAST SUSSEX.

To face page 22.

The following questionable compliment is by a brother sergeant on William Morrison, drill sergeant to the 80th Regiment of foot:

"'If manly conduct—loyal zeal
If strict integrity you prize;
If dauntless valour—ought avail,
Poor Morrison deserves your sighs.'"

And there are, moreover, several brief references to Bexhill to be found in the early guide books to Hastings, the most important being perhaps that in Diplock's "Guide" (*circa* 1820), which states: "Bexhill is about six miles to the west of Hastings and a most delightful morning ride along the Coast, there were here extensive Barracks established, and for several years occupied by the German Troops as their chief military depôt. There is also a good and convenient Inn (The Bell Hotel), with every accommodation calculated for the reception of strangers, who, in summer, are frequently induced to visit this rural spot. Very recently, a few lodging Houses, a circulating Library, and a small theatre (this was the Assembly Room at The Bell), have been erected; and Mr. Brook, a respectable resident, keeps a most excellent pack of Hounds,[1] which in the winter and sporting seasons, affords recreation and amusement. . . ." Diplock p. 57.

Our last extract must be from a pamphlet written by Dr. Wills, who was an inhabitant of Bexhill, entitled "From Bexelei to Bexhill." On p. 8, speaking of the rapid growth of the town, he says: "All this, it may well be supposed, has not been viewed with unmixed feelings by the older residents, and any one who was familiar with Bexhill in the 'seventies' will not fail to sympathise with their regrets for its departed repose and rural charm. Then Bexhill was a tiny village, crowded in between the venerable church and ancient manor-house, nestling among trees and looking down across breezy slopes on the white coast-guard station and the open Channel. Between it and St. Leonards there were scarce half-a-dozen houses, and Wills, p. 8.

[1] This pack was afterwards well known as the "Bexhill Harriers." Arthur Sawyer Brook, known as "Squire" Brook, hunted them for fifty-five years. He resided at Grange House, Sea Road, Bexhill, and died in 1890.

the road still had its high hedges full of brambles and wild flowers all the way into the village. . . . First as one passed two great cornstacks, which seem to have been built from time immemorial on the same spot, one saw across a little hollow the church and handsome rectory standing among the trees of the park-like glebe; then the road ran by a long quaint house, which in process of time has grown by adoption out of the stabling and offices of an old coal mine (or, rather, of a mine for coal, seeing that notwithstanding £80,000 spent on looking for it, no coal ever came to light), and past the gables of the old manor-house with its chocked stew-ponds below, and so underneath the boughs of a huge walnut-tree, into the street to the ancient Inn, and quaint old church with its dormer windows and stuccoed tower; or, turning to the left, past a hideous, quasi-modern house, in which tradition says the 'Iron Duke' once quartered—and by the village smithy, one reached the brow of a steep declivity and saw, across some half-mile of corn and pasture, the wide bright blue of the open Channel, with the broad sweep of Pevensey Bay and all the country up to Lewes Gap, the grand smooth lines of the South Downs and Beachy Head girdling round the lowlands like a picture-frame."

It would not be proper to conclude this short history without some small mention of those two industries which formed so considerable a part of Sussex life in bygone days—viz., iron working and smuggling: "In January, 1574, there is a petition from Ralphe Hogg 'manufacturer of guns and shot for the Ordnance Office' to the Council, complaining of the infringement of the patent granted him by the Queen for the sole exportation of ordnance, whereupon a list was procured giving the names of the owners of Iron Works in the three counties (viz., Sussex, Surrey and Kent) and therein among others appears:

S.A.C., Vol. III., p. 241.

> "The Lord Dacres, 1 fordg, 1 furnace, in Buckholt, in the handes of Jeffreys." (Lord Dacre of Herstmonceux Castle.)

S.A.C., Vol. XIV., p. 219.

This Jeffreys was one Bartholemew Jefferay; he "was seated at Buckholt, in the parish of Bexhill, where he carried

on considerable iron works as appears by his Will, in which he mentions his 'fforge, ffurnace and Woodes'; he died in or about 17th Eliz. and was buried in Bexhill Church. Of smuggling, which seems to have been carried on in Sussex on a larger scale and with perhaps greater impunity than in any other county in England, there are some few records which refer to Bexhill." "In September, 1824, a run was attempted at Bexhill, when seven smugglers, with one hundred tubs of spirits, were taken; and one of the Blockade-men named Welch having jumped into the boat the smugglers pulled off with him, and his dead body was found on the sands in the morning, with the head and face bruised and lacerated. . . ." "Another, and nearly the last of these blood sheddings took place on January 3rd, 1828, near Bexhill; a lugger landed between that village and the little public house at Bo-peep; a party of smugglers, armed with bats (staves), rushed to the beach, landed the cargo, and made off with it in carts, on horses and on men's backs, straight to Sidley Green; here they were come up with by the blockade reinforced to about forty men; the armed portion of the smugglers drew themselves up in regular line, and a desperate fight took place. The smugglers fought with such determination and courage that the blockade-men were repulsed . . . and the Quartermaster Collins, killed. In the first volley fired by the blockade, an old smuggler named Smithurst was killed; his body was found the next morning, with his bat still grasped in his hands, the weapon being almost hacked to pieces by the cutlasses of the blockade-men. Here again, as was their invariable habit, the smugglers carried safely away all their wounded."

S.A.C., Vol. X., pp. 92, 93.

Not only were all the Martello Towers along the coast garrisoned by the Government blockade-men, but cavalry were stationed at Bexhill and Hastings to reinforce the coastguard, but the industry flourished for many years and many people were deeply interested in it. "Large capitals have been invested in this business, particularly at Bexhill. Many of the small farmers, if they do not participate, certainly connive at these practices; those who do not directly profit consider that it is advantageous as finding employ for many who would be

Teignmouth, Vol. I., p. 126; Vol. II., p. 34.

otherwise thrown on their parishes. The smugglers are now much more ferocious, since the use of firearms is more constant." (Majendie's Report, 1833.)

Teignmouth Vol. II., pp. 12, 13.

"In the old burial ground at Bexhill the writers (Teignmouth and Harper) discovered a melancholy reminder of these lawless times in the shape of two headstones, bearing the following inscriptions:

"'In memory of David Watts of the Coast Guard Station No. XLII. Tower. He was shot and almost instantly expired on the 21st Feb. 1832, aged 45 years.

"'Short was the warning, quick the summons flew,
Ere scarce his weeping friends could bid adieu.'"

Also:

"'In memory of William Meekes, the Chief Boatman of Coastguard Station No. XLII. Tower. He was mortally wounded on the night of the 21st and died on the 23rd of February 1832, aged 35 years.'"

This short "labour of love" must now draw to its conclusion. Other hands may haply continue the history of Bexhill down to the present time, or may even seek to penetrate those dark and distant ages when the early Bex-men "blue with woad" roamed o'er the Sussex Weald.

"Though all the rest were all my share,
With equal soul I'd see
Her nine and thirty sisters fair,
Yet none more fair than she.
Choose ye your need from Thames to Tweed,
And I will choose instead
Such lands as lie 'twixt Rake and Rye,
Black Down and Beachy Head."

RUDYARD KIPLING: "Sussex."

(*By permission.*)

GLOSSARY

COTTAR (Latin *cotarius*): A cottager having a free socage, or tenure, and paying by way of rent in kind, money, or personal service.

DEMESNE: That part of a manor retained by the lord for his own support or residence and not let out to tenants.

HIDE (Latin *hida*): An area of land variable in different localities; in Sussex probably about sixty acres. Spelman estimates the total number of hides in Sussex as 7,000.

HUNDRED: A portion of the county in which dwelt 100 sureties for the king's peace. Instituted by King Alfred. Area said to equal about 100 hides.

MANOR (Latin *manerium*): Probably as ancient as the Saxon Constitution, but stated by some to be of Norman introduction. At the time of the Domesday Survey the demesne of the Crown consisted of 1,422 manors in different counties together with quit rents arising out of several other manors. Those who held manors immediately from the Crown were said to hold *in capite*, and they had other chiefs or lords subordinate to themselves who also made grants to others in their turn. These intermediate persons were known as mesne lords. The lord divided the manor into two parts: one he retained for his own support, and this was termed his demesne; the other he parcelled out among his dependents, who in return gave him their services towards the cultivation of his demesne and in other ways.

PLOUGH (Latin *carucata*): Probably as much land as can be tilled or cultivated by one plough and the beasts belonging thereto in one year, together with a proportionate measure of pasture and housing for man and beast.

PREBEND: The share of the revenues of a church granted to an officiating clergyman therein.

RAPE: A territorial division of land peculiar to Sussex; greater than the hundred.

SUB-INFEUDATIONS: Small or subsidiary manors sublet or divided from the manor paramount.

VILLEINS (Latin *villani*): Persons in a state of absolute servitude in Saxon times; they with their families and effects belonged to their lords. If they were attached to a manor, they were known as villeins *regardant*; if they were annexed to the person of the lord, they were termed villeins *en gross*. These villeins in course of time were granted small holdings of land by their lord on certain terms, and these grants gradually constituted the manor.

WIST (Latin *wista*): One-half of a hide of land. The area differed in various localities. In Sussex it was probably equal to thirty acres. *Cf.* Crabb's Technological Dictionary, London, 1833.

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